

THE NEWS LETTER

OF THE COLLEGE ENGLISH ASSOCIATION

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Teach Contemporary Literature?

Modern literature that is contemporary with most of its profession has already won a humble position for itself in most college curricula. Modern literature that is contemporary with its students is in a far less favored position.

Various reasons have been offered for the neglect by most college English departments of the latter part of contemporary literature: the difficulty of finding a place for it in the crowded English program, the uncertainty regarding what of it is worth reading, and the notions that it is dangerous, demoralizing. Probably the real reasons are the indolence of the professor, who can't be bothered with "any more new authors," his pusillanimous retreat from critical responsibility for dishonoring between the first-rate and the third-rate. The professor who is what to think about Milton, as the histories tell him. He doesn't know what to think about Joyce, because they don't stop at 1914, or even earlier.

The weightiest reason for the neglect of genuinely contemporary literature is the crowded state of the college English program. The program would, of course, be less crowded if we were not under the illusion that most of our students are embryo Ph.D.'s and that they should, therefore, be given a solid foundation in the history of English literature from Beowulf to James Hardy. As a matter of fact, few of our students achieve a doctor's degree, and of these few, only a small percentage should have been prevented from working for

we were to throw off the incubus of the graduate school and content our English programs on a more realistic rather than historical-philosophical principles, there would be plenty of room in our programs for the study of contemporary literature. Such a study is possible on various grounds: the presence of its problems, situations, and characters; its imaginative accessibility and its intelligibility. The most important reason for its study is the opportunity it offers for the solution of real critical problems. The critical task is immediate and important. It involves risks, but it is also a challenge to the intelligence, imagination, taste, and insight of the teacher and the student.

Experience in evaluating contemporary literature is likely to have a consistent influence on readers after graduation, will read—only the latest

Fred B. Millett
Wesleyan University

Plans for CEA Annual Meeting in Indianapolis

The third annual meeting of CEA will be held in Indianapolis, Sunday and Monday, December 28 and 29, on the day preceding and on the opening day of Modern Language Association meetings. CEA headquarters will be at the Claypool Hotel, which will also serve as MLA general headquarters as well as for the English sections of MLA. The foreign language groups will use the Lincoln Hotel across the street as their center.

The chairmen of our Program and Local Committees have announced that plans are still incomplete as to detail, but the following general plans may be of interest to our membership at this time.

Our program will open on Sunday, December 28, at four o'clock, with papers and discussion dealing with this question: "What can teachers of English do to help preserve the democratic conditions in America?" with particular reference to freshman and sophomore courses.

On Monday, December 29, at 10 o'clock, there will be papers and

discussion concerned with "The influence of democracy on literary and cultural standards." And at 11 o'clock the general topic will be "The values of literature in the present crisis."

The annual dinner will be held at the Claypool, at 7 o'clock, Sunday evening. There will be an address by President Norman Foerster and entertainment appropriate to the neighborhood and the occasion.

Rates at the Claypool are as follows: Single rooms, \$2.50; for two persons, double bed, \$3.50; for two persons, twin beds, \$4.50.

Special railroad rates are arranged by the MLA and will be announced in a later issue.

The proximity of New Year's Day to the time of meetings this year has compelled several of the associations affiliated with the MLA to make use of Sunday. Members arriving early on that day will find arrangements made for their comfort and for the widening of acquaintance with fellow members.

Semantics in Action

The first semester of Freshman English at Syracuse University is given over primarily to instruction in composition. And because the members of the English I staff at Syracuse are convinced that problems of reading and writing have been made more difficult and complex by the unconscious misuse and by the conscientious and premeditated abuse not only of individual words but of language structure as well, and because like all other teachers of composition we know that there must be clear thinking before there can be good writing, we have introduced into our first semester the study of semantics, trusting in a technique of instruction purposely designed to deal with the current language complexities.

It is not news to anyone that many students enter college so poorly prepared in the fundamentals of grammar, spelling, punctuation, sentence structure, organization, etc., that drill in elementary mechanics becomes in the freshman year a not too agreeable necessity. However, not only is this elementary drill disagreeable; latterly it has been unsatisfying.

That is to say, as a technique for the study of "language in action," it does not work. Superior students do not need it; poor students are not helped by it, not enough, that is, to make it worthwhile. (Allow me, parenthetically: I bear no ill will toward handbooks, rhetorics, etc., as reference books; in fact, every student ought to have some sort of desk book on English usage to be referred to when he is writing, and, when the need arises, to be used as a classroom text.)

In the first place, as everyone knows, before a student begins to write, he ought to have something to say. The average freshman is not aware of his own experiential resources, and quite naturally has very little to say; and like most human beings he has an obvious inclination to let others do his thinking for him. Too often he comes to college bearing a mind packed with ideas as ready-made as the clothes in his trunk.

Now the "traditional" handbook describes, according to rules and regulations, a "traditional" way of saying something well. But it does not provoke the student to thoughts of his own on a specific writing exercise. It is not intended to. These are platitudes, but my excuse is that without them my argument may be easily misunderstood as well as willfully misinterpreted.

Now the virtue of semantic analysis is that it will give him something to say. Suppose, for example, he is asked to write a report of an activity, or of a person, or a situation—a report which consciously excludes favorable or unfavorable inferences, judgments, "loaded" words. He will know where to begin and where he is going; he will have something to say ready to his hand, and an assignment which, even at the beginning of his writing career, he can do intelligently and well if he will.

In the nineteenth century parsing sentences was a discipline which assumed the basic principle of composition to be sentence architecture. Words, like bricks, merely waited in the store-room, at rest with fixed and single meaning, until needed in the grammatical structure being built. The study of the

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Composition Teachers and Writers

Several NEWS LETTER articles have attributed an alleged shortcoming among teachers of composition to the fact that few are themselves writers. For example, in the May, 1941, issue, page 5, we read: "It takes a writer to do a good job of teaching writing, just as it takes a painter to teach painting, just as it takes a musician to do a good job of teaching music."

Such statements seem to me to repeat an age-old confusion that requires another attempted clarification. These superficial analogies are more misleading than helpful; that the historian teaches history and that therefore the writer teaches writing (*sc.* composition) is a specious trick of language, easily detectable without recourse to writing, and writings. One might as well argue that only a voyager can teach geography, that only a financier can teach amortization, or that a lawyer who has not sat upon the bench is incompetent to criticize a judge's decision.

If composition courses aim to produce free-lance writers, syndicated columnists, or by-line reporters, then perhaps they should be taught by a successful competitor in the market. But only perhaps, for the successful professional writer is usually such an individualized product of his own personality and style that, if he were coaxed into the classroom, his advice might prove as sound as that of an octogenarian who reveals that buttermilk and tobacco hold the secrets of longevity. Furthermore, he might be uninformed about the nonagenarian in the next county who in his youth foreswore those panaceas.

The composition course, however, aims not to produce professional, or even amateur, writers. Its object is, or should be, clear and effective utilization of language for everyday self-expression and mutual understanding. The demands upon language for these objectives are infinitely complicated, and the race is not to the writers who use language professionally but to the educated who can employ it as a tool with a minimum of the botchery that mars our thinking from the ringing of the alarm to the jumping of the ultimate sheep. Teachers of all subjects claim a humble couch in the folds of the educated; the English teacher has specialized in the language which is the core both of the composition course and of communication among the educated.

Because the connection between graduate courses and the baffling plethora of handbooks and rhetorics supporting the composition course appears at first tenuous, an opinion has been bandied about that gradu-

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THE NEWS LETTER

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Membership in the College English Association, including THE NEWS LETTER, \$2.00 a year. Subscription for Non-Members and Libraries, \$1.50.

With Your News Letter This Month

Perhaps the most conspicuous aspect of this issue of THE NEWS LETTER is the brochure that accompanies it, the format as well as the contents of which it is hoped will be pleasing. The happy suggestion of John Erskine that we offer an occasional monograph to supplement our monthly journal is thus experimentally carried out with the publication of Dr. I. A. Richards' paper on the evaluation of words.

Semantics is a term so widely and so glibly used at the moment that we are avoiding it, except to urge somewhat circuitously the timeliness of our first chapbook. The editors will welcome from our members an expression of opinion concerning the policy of issuing occasional supplements of this sort, and likewise suggestions for subject matter.

Mutual Aid

And the new chapbook should be a reminder that the CEA and THE NEWS LETTER can serve our membership better if that membership increases.

The regular issuance of six- or even eight-page NEWS LETTERS and more frequent chapbooks will provide a greater amount of reading matter which the editors fondly hope will have a high degree of professional interest and importance. It will also provide for more expression by the members themselves, and self-expression is rather more stimulating than mere rumination.

But because the policy of THE NEWS LETTER is to limit advertisers to four column-inches, publication expenses must be met principally from the two-dollar annual fee. At present the total income will barely cover the cost of four-page issues and a semi-occasional chapbook in addition to the expenses of the very simple activities of the Association itself.

The Association attempts to increase its membership by circular

letters, free copies of THE NEWS LETTER, and by other means. But effective promotion can also be carried on by individuals. Members can tell their colleagues that THE NEWS LETTER is worth while and its cost moderate. Heads of departments, knowing that active participation in one way or another in the Association is stimulating, can tell their subordinates the same thing.

Editorial Aid

This issue of THE NEWS LETTER also introduces Cornell M. Dowlin, Ph.D., assistant professor of English in the University of Pennsylvania, who will serve as associate editor of this pedagogical compendium (at a salary identical with that received by your editor). Mr. Dowlin has had extensive experience in what are euphuistically termed the "practical applications" of written English in the outside world.

He spent four years with The Century Company after graduating from the University of Pennsylvania, has contributed occasional articles to American and British reviews, and was editor and chief author of *The University of Pennsylvania Today*, a lively and informative volume published in connection with that University's bi-centennial celebration. He earned his doctorate under the guidance of Felix Schelling in 1932, and now conducts undergraduate courses in various forms of English composition.

Since our publication office has been transferred to the University of Pennsylvania Press, our new editorial aid will be most conveniently placed to chaperone THE NEWS LETTER's successive appearances, and—best of all—he will share with your editor the responsibility for returning learned treatises which exceed one thousand words in length. The more disagreeable letters of rejection will undoubtedly be penned by him.

Our British Colleagues

In the CEA balloting last spring, an overwhelming majority of our members voted in favor of extending some sort of aid or practical evidence of fellowship to "The English Association" of Great Britain, which is carrying on despite the war. An inquiry by our Secretary brought the reply that we could aid better as individuals than as a group, by becoming members.

There are three classes of membership: annual (which includes a subscription to *English*, the magazine of the Association, and a copy of the presidential address) dues, 10/6 (\$2.12); sustaining (which includes also a copy of *Essays and Studies* and *The Year's Work in English Studies*) dues, one guinea; and life membership, dues five pounds. Members in any class may purchase the publications of the Association at special rates.

On request the Secretary of CEA will send additional information, a list of English Association publications, and a membership application. A letter follows—one of several which do no more than hint of the courageous struggle of our British colleagues to keep a flame burning:

THE ENGLISH ASSOCIATION
OXFORD, ENGLAND

Your kind letter of March 8 to Dr. Boas was received at our office in London toward the end of last month and communicated to the Committee at the earliest opportunity.

I hope that after discussion with those of your Directors who were near at hand, you approved the suggestion that individual members of your Association should be encouraged to subscribe to ours. I need hardly say how grateful we shall be for such a course of action and how warmly we shall welcome new members from your Association. In answer to your question as to the collection of subscriptions, our secretary, Miss Fielding, tells me that the simplest method would be that already in use by such members as we already have in the U.S.A., both individuals and some libraries; viz., that intending members should send their forms of application together with the subscription direct to her. Subscriptions are usually received from the U.S.A. in the form of an International Money Order for either 10/6 or a guinea, according as the subscriber wishes to receive *The Year's Work and Essays and Studies* or not.

The Spring, Summer, and Autumn numbers of *English* are usually published in April, July and November, the Residential address being distributed with the summer number. *Essays and Studies* and *The Year's Work* are usually published about the end of June, but during the war a little allowance has to be made for delay. I understand from the Secretary that she is sending to you, under separate cover, 100 copies of our prospectus together with forms of application for membership, and also the Annual Report for 1940. On hearing from you we shall be happy to send you further copies.

I cannot disguise from you the fact that our Association is in very serious financial straits. Owing to the war, both membership subscriptions and royalties have heavily slumped. In earlier years we relied too much on the friendly credit of our publishers and the promising success of *Poems of Today*. In recent years we have been endeavoring to reduce our liabilities. We are cutting our expenditures to the bone, and shall probably have to ask our members to forego all return for their money for the duration of the war.

Even so we shall come to the end of our reserves in another two or three years unless we can find some person or some cultural trust sufficiently interested in our survival to come to our aid. In the present concentration of interest on the war our chances of attracting this favorable attention are not bright—*inter arma silent Musae*. Or at least their voices are not likely to be heard pleading for help, though your generous and unsolicited gesture encourages us to make every effort to carry on and to explore fresh fields not only for survival but for useful work. In any such work I hope that your Association and ours may find opportunities for coöperation.

Nowell Smith

From the Mail-Bag

Dear Editor:

We language and literature instructors are all familiar with a doctrine that the young and aspiring student of letters is in constant danger of having his Shakespeare and other authors killed for him by school insistence on aspects for which he, in the virgin freshness of his mind and heart, has no enthusiasm. Even faculty members thus occasionally offer what they obviously regard as perfect alibis for their lack of knowledge of literature, to say nothing of language and languages.

But it is genuinely startling when Pearl Buck admits a belief and experience of this sort, which we had supposed confined to the Philistines. With her the issue is not debatable: "My own love for Shakespeare, *lost* through the drilling of an English Master." (THE NEWS LETTER, April, 1941, italics mine.)

With the greatest of respect for this distinguished author and expert in the psychology of character, it nevertheless appears to me not acceptable that a student lay paramount blame for his shortcomings—especially in literary appreciation—upon his instructors. It is a procedure too much favored by unimaginative and lethargic people to explain and justify their mediocrities or worse, and even oftentimes to nourish a martyr complex. My achievements are poor and trivial matched with Pearl Buck's. I shall not win a Nobel prize. But forty thousand professors could not kill my love of Shakespeare.

A. M. Withers

W. Va., State Teachers College

Dear Editor:

In the May issue of THE NEWS LETTER, I find an interesting set of pros and cons in regard to Freshman English. This subject is always interesting to me. I have the idea, from the much-discussion of the subject, that nobody knows just what procedure is even probably the best from the classroom standpoint. We all know that this world does not at all depend upon Freshman English for criteria of any sort.

I believe that Freshman English is simply an *influence*, or a *pressure-area* to which students are subjected for a time and from which they eventually escape, many of them practically unscathed. I agree that the administration of Freshman English should be strict, and when necessary, even "brutal and cruel," as someone wrote in the *Journal* a few months ago, for all experienced instructors are aware of the rapid convalescence of most students from Freshman English. The pedagogical threat of "if not, thou shalt surely die," is still in place, though the instructor must remember, and at a proper time remind the students, that really they will not "die," for after all, *thought* is supreme over *form*. Only the confirmed *pedagogue* will pause over a split infinitive when an excellent thought has been delivered.

Roland D. Carter
Hiwassee College

Semantics in Action

(Continued from Page 1)

meaning and function of words and of the function of a given sentence structure, however, is a discipline which assumes that meaning constantly changes according to context and purpose.

But in teaching composition there is a second difficulty with which all teachers are well acquainted, namely, that a student will not write clearly until he thinks clearly. And I still have the touching belief that it is the business of a university to help him to think clearly. There can be no doubt that our thinking is muddled and haphazard for just so long as we unconsciously assume the meanings of words to be unchanging; added for as long as we assume words to be the things they stand for; muddled until we realize that affective connotations are not informative; confused when we believe that ritual language is verifiable; and immature so long as we are glib and thoughtless in our use of high-order abstractions.

The principles of unity, coherence, and emphasis are apparent in the architecture of good writing, but in an age which is conspicuous for its lack of the first two, in an age when language is consciously misused to suit the interests of the misuser, and in an age when false communication is deliberately encouraged, teaching students the rules of good writing is not going to inspire them to think clearly (or even to think) about the meaning of what they are saying.

To examine meaning is to examine sentence structure. A compound fracture of the sentence is less likely to result from a fight with a period than it is from a collision with a prejudice. Ungrammatical structure is often evidence of a mind blocked by an obstacle (perhaps a single word) of which it is unaware. Semantic analysis will require the student to think, at least it is designed to do so; and when that happens, clarity of expression is not far off.

My third observation on the teaching of composition finds universal agreement, I think, among instructors: there is no substitute for learning to write quite like writing. All the practice books in existence (which is saying a good deal) and all the chapter-ending exercises available will not in themselves teach a student to write well. The daily theme eye needs new glasses the better to see the world we live in, and it has been our experience at Syracuse that the semantic approach offers exercises in abundance that stimulate and provoke the student to look around him with a new vision. The old topics, "My Hobby," for example, pale in the exciting light of a semantic analysis of current oratorical efforts.

And lastly, although advanced courses in composition may often be said to teach themselves, most instructors of Freshman English prefer some sort of program or

method of approach to the problems involved. The study of language from the point of view of meaning is a sufficiently severe training and enjoys a working method suitable for classroom study. The technique may be observed in S. I. Hayakawa's admirable *Language in Action*, the textbook which we are using at Syracuse. It was not because we thought the "right" way to teach composition had at last turned up in the form of semantics that we experimented with the "science of meaning," but rather, among the other reasons I have mentioned, precisely because the semantic approach seemed so readily usable in class.

In conclusion, the semantic approach has the virtue of being a moral as well as an intellectual discipline. If the student can be taught that words are not things; that meaning is constantly changing, not fixed and irrevocable, but that, in fact, words seldom if ever have exactly the same meaning twice; if he is urged to look for the meaning of a word in the context which surrounds it and not in some unexamined dictionary of his mind where the word has the meaning he thinks it ought to have because that is the meaning he wants it to have—observing, in the process, that words mean what we want them to mean; if he knows that language is an instrument which may be used to cut both ways; if he can be taught to see how words often get between him and his judgments; and if he can be stimulated carefully to analyze the language predicaments in which he finds himself and the language situations in which he finds others—if he is taught to examine his unconscious assumptions about the "right" meanings of words, he may, it is true, be shocked out of a few pet beliefs; but in having found out his wrong-headedness for himself, the shock will lose much of its force; and the student will not only be increasingly aware of the importance of clearly thinking out his own moral problems for himself, but he will have learned a technique readily employed in thinking out these problems.

I daresay that in what I have written above I have not misrepresented myself. It is obvious that I am not a professional semanticist, nor any laboratory technician in the science of meaning; and I know even less about the practice of semantic therapy. But having used the semantic approach to the study of composition, I fancy that despite the "newness" of its vocabulary, semantics is nothing new under the sun. For all wise men have in one way or another been semanticists, and all good teachers have spent their energy fighting the well-known hokum wherever they have found it—in the written word and in the spoken word. Teaching students to recognize humbug when they see it, and to know nonsense when they talk it or write it, is not merely a current fad.

Weller B. Embler
Syracuse University

"Unity in Variety"

The Intent of the Artist by Sherwood Anderson, Thornton Wilder, Roger Sessions, and William Lescaze. Edited, with an introduction, by Augusto Centeno. Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1941.

An admirable idea is behind this book, and it is excellently carried out. Four artists—a story teller, a dramatist, a composer, and an architect—talk thoughtfully and lucidly about the way they have found the creative imagination to work in their chosen mediums; and one could hardly come upon a better illustration of the essential unity of the artistic experience.

For, writing independently, these four men are in profound agreement with one another. Each says in his own way what Professor Centeno so ably summarizes in his introduction as the intent of the artist: "It originates in an attitude of sensuous possessiveness toward reality; it presupposes both separateness and non-separation from actual life; it accentuates livingness; it creates a sense of equilibrium between permanence and flux; it imparts a feeling of vicarious immortality."

Yet the presentations of these four artists are richly diverse. Sherwood Anderson writes with candid intimacy of the subtle relations between reality and art. Thornton Wilder presents "Some Thoughts on Playwrighting" in brilliant synopsis. Roger Sessions illuminates the process of "movement" in music by analyzing the opening bars of the Tristan Prelude, and then goes on to explain the principles of association, progression, and contrast which seem inseparable from music as an art of movement. Casting his contribution in the form of a dialogue, illustrated by a series of sketches, William Lescaze demonstrates that an "architecture which is not born of the conditions, the purposes, the people, the time, is doomed." All four of these discussions testify to Professor Centeno's dictum that the artist is a man who cannot separate himself from livingness."

Harold Blodgett

Central New York Meeting

English teachers in colleges of central New York, from Buffalo to Albany and from St. Lawrence to Colgate—or further afield—are notified that last year's successful experiment will be repeated.

Place: Linklaen House, Cazenovia.

Time: Afternoon, dinner, and evening of Saturday, October 18.

Invitation to all teachers of English in colleges in upper New York, men and women (incidentally, wives and husbands, also).

Persons spending Saturday night should make arrangements directly with the Linklaen House.

Dinner, \$1.25.

Acceptances should be sent in advance to Professor Horace A. Eaton, Syracuse University.

New England Meeting

The autumn meeting of the New England Section of the CEA will be held at Tufts College on Friday and Saturday, November 7 and 8. On Friday afternoon Professor George Sherburn of Harvard will lead a discussion of the undergraduate curriculum in English. An informal dinner will be followed by a symposium on "The Central Problem in Literary Criticism" led by Professors Theodore Spencer and Theodore Morrison of Harvard.

On Saturday morning Mr. Hugh Walpole will open a discussion of Semantics with Professor F. Cudworth Flint of Dartmouth presiding. Professor Elizabeth Manwarling of Wellesley will close the morning program with an analysis of the topic "American Literature in the Present Emergency."

The meeting will end with a luncheon at which Professor Mary Ellen Chase of Smith will give the first of what is expected to be a series of talks at following meetings on "Non-Professional Activities of an English Teacher." She will speak of her activities as novelist and lecturer.

Since all the topics concern the special province of the CEA and since the whole program is specially aimed at eliciting general discussion, the committee on arrangements expects the meeting to be as successful as the very interesting meetings of the preceding academic year.

The committee on arrangements is: Ralph P. Boas of Wheaton, chairman; Katharine Balderston of Wellesley, vice-chairman; and Donald Brodine of Tufts, secretary-treasurer.

"Learning hath gained most by those books by which the printers have lost," said Thomas Fuller, but this wise saying need not disturb our friendly attitude towards our advertisers.

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Notice

Teachers of undergraduate English courses in colleges of recognized standing (and all those who have so taught) are invited to join the College English Association at this time by mailing name and address and an indication of teaching rank or position, together with the annual dues of two dollars, to the Treasurer, William R. Richardson, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Va. New members enrolling now will be "paid up" until January 1, 1943; they will receive *THE NEWS LETTER* for the remaining months of this year as well as throughout the year following; and they will be entitled to vote and to a voice in determining policies at two annual meetings. All new members are urged to use this periodical for the concise expression of opinions, ideas, suggestions, and notions of any sort likely to interest fellow teachers of undergraduate English.

A literary contest for high school and college students is announced by the editors of *Common Ground*, a quarterly published by the Common Council for American Unity. According to Louis Adamic, editor-in-chief, \$100 in cash prizes and 10 subscriptions to *Common Ground* will be awarded the winning contestants. Entries must be submitted before February 15, 1942. Additional information may be obtained by writing to the Contest Editor, 222 Fourth Ave., New York. Material may be submitted in any form—story, essay, poem, sketch, etc.—but it should explore the theme of American unity.

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Composition Teachers and Writers

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ate study unfits a man for teaching composition. Although some have a predilection for a scholarly regimen that makes them uninterested in undergraduate composition, anyone who has been disciplined by the difficulties of acquiring a doctorate can solve the problems of undergraduate composition, provided, and here is the nub of the matter, he has been educated into the bargain. These problems require a more searching approach than those of any graduate course, and one cannot help wondering whether the excessive experimenting with textbooks and methodology is not evidence that some composition teachers are more at sea than they ought to be. Perhaps we need a teacher's college to demonstrate that students learn inversely to the weight of their textbooks (over two if bound in red).

To jump to the conclusion that the trouble lies in the fact that teachers are not writers is to betray ignorance of a writer's work and life. What is a writer? I shall not define him but simply state that his constant preoccupation with what he is writing, his laborious revising that constitutes training which no person or college can give him, and his concentration upon the requirements of the market in which he seeks recognition render him unfit for expending simultaneously any effort upon the intellectual requirements of teaching.

Aspirant authors who take to teaching while they are learning to write invariably become poor teachers. It is easy to suggest that a teacher toss off some publishable prose or poetry once or twice a year—if it is not publishable commercially, I presume he is not a "writer," for the proponents of the view I am objecting to imply that scholarly publication is not writing—but what about the tens of thousands of words for the wastebasket for every publishable thousand? When is he going to pound those out amidst a full-time teaching schedule?

If all composition teachers, instead of the few exceptions, were to become writers, the world could hardly absorb their outpourings. Every publishing house and magazine office is flooded with good contributions. The persistent writer is occasionally rewarded with an acceptance, more and more so as his name becomes known. The unrecognized teacher with a few annual offerings, good though they might be, would be left at the post. A career in writing has no more shortcuts than one in teaching.

Conversely, if colleges were to seek writers rather than graduate students to teach composition, the available supply of acceptable candidates would prove small. Few successful writers would consider such an appointment, and many of those who almost merit this magic label of writer would be unsuitable.

For instance, some of our recognized poets could not explain in plain English what has been eating them, and some fiction writers, of necessity contemporaries, would be

experimenters in a contemporary style and method which, however effective, would be unsuitable for undergraduates striving to write clearly.

Both these hypotheses whereby a man, half teacher and half writer, must go to buffets with himself are untenable because they fail to appreciate what a writer is and what a teacher is.

A teacher practices an art too. His skill is as painstakingly acquired as the writer's and requires full-time effort. If he is a composition teacher, then through his knowledge of literature and his enthusiasm for discriminating use of language he demonstrates by intelligent prescription and presentation day after day the composition which is his subject and which forms an essential of the undergraduate's general education. In the specialized profession of writing, colleges give special courses, but they are not, and should not be confused with, courses in composition.

Philip B. Gove
New York University

If You Should Ask Us

It may be mere editorial inadvocence, and therefore any criticism might properly be regarded as ill-natured and/or pedantic, but from time to time respected publications print non-restrictive clauses without benefit of commas. For instance, in the October *Harpers* we read that the President ran "afoul of the farm bloc which has been so well nurtured by eight years of his vigorous program of benefits" (p. 527); and about "Albert Meyers who, oddly enough, was until recently employed by the Department of Agriculture" (p. 528).

Though these may be the result of oversight, occasionally such omissions seem to be the normal typographical style. If memory is not too deceptive, back in 1933 on not one of the 1224 pages of *Anthony Adverse* were commas placed around relative clauses that modified the name of a character.

To be frank, we don't like it. And if someone should reply that the meaning of the sentence is clear nevertheless, we would counter that a phrase in apposition is equally clear without commas. Similarly, if someone should insist, very properly, that too many commas cause faulty rhythm, as in the Albert Meyers quotation above, we would answer that they should be dropped from around the adverbial expression, not the clause.

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